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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 ANKARA 000068

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, S/CT AND EUR/SE DOUG SILLIMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/03/2029

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SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY BURNS DISCUSSES IRAQ AND MEPP WITH TURKISH MFA

REF: ANKARA 6809

Classified By: Ambassador Eric S. Edelman, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (S) Summary: NEA Assistant Secretary Bill Burns reconfirmed for senior Turkish MFA Middle East officials US commitment to the fulfillment of Iraq-wide elections on January 30, the establishment of an equitable government thereafter and the creation of an Iraqi security force able to take the lead in securing the peace. Highlighting the Deputy Secretary's recent meetings in the region (septels), he underscored US efforts with Kurdish leader Barzani to end his opposition to provincial elections in Kirkuk. A/S Burns welcomed Turkish contributions to the NATO Training Mission for the Iraqi security forces but underscored the need for additional training and equipment assistance. Turkish Acting Under Secretary Sensoy confirmed Turkey's firm support of the January elections but registered concerns about low Sunni participation and Kurdish aspirations for Kirkuk. Sensoy expressed Turkey's disappointment at the lack of US action against the PKK and noted the desire for the organization's elimination in the near term. Both looked forward to the Jan. 11 trilateral (TU/US/IZ) talks. Deputy U/S Uzumcu asked for US assistance to facilitate the opening of a second border post with Iraq. U/S Sensoy said FM Gul would emphasize Turkey's support for the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) in upcoming meetings with Israeli and Palestinian officials and underscored Turkey's desire for a concrete role. Deputy Director General (DDG) Akat pledged Turkey's continued efforts for the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) initiative. End Summary.

2. (U) A/S Burns met with Turkish MFA Acting Under Secretary Nabi Sensoy and Deputy U/S for Middle East, Africa, Caucasus and South Asia Affairs Ahmet Uzumcu on Jan. 3, to discuss Iraq and the MEPP just hours before Uzumcu's departure with FM Gul for meetings with the Israelis and Palestinians. Also participating in the meeting from Turkey were Deputy U/S Ahmet Uzumcu, Special Envoy for Iraq Osman Koruturk, DDG for Policy Planning Mehmet Akat, DDG for Middle East Affairs Sefak Gokturk and DDG for the Americas Suna Ilicak. PolCouns, PolMilCouns and Deputy PolMilCouns accompanied A/S Burns.

IRAQ

Elections:

3. (S) Election Timing: Acting U/S Sensoy emphasized that Turkey shared the fundamental US objective of a peaceful Iraq, both internally and in relations with its neighbors. A united Iraq with a solid democratic structure was critical to avoid future instability. In Sensoy's view, however, the current situation in Iraq didn't reflect these objectives. Turkey wanted to see elections take place as scheduled on Jan. 30, with equitable participation by all segments of society. Concerned about low Sunni participation, Turkey was using its influence to persuade Sunni leaders but could not do this alone and needed US assistance. Special Iraq Envoy Koruturk expressed concern about out-of-country voter fraud that could falsely inflate the number of Shia votes. Equitable participation was necessary to ensure fair representation in the new government and an equitable constitution. Turkey would participate in the Jan. 6 meeting of neighboring countries in Amman, during which full election participation would be high on the agenda. According to Sensoy, Turkey would try to influence its neighbors at the meeting to help combat those groups working against the election process, but in Sensoy's view the US also needed to make a forceful effort.

4. (S) US Approach: A/S Burns confirmed US agreement on our shared common goal of a unified, stable Iraq and reiterated the US three-pronged strategy (political, economic, security) toward that end. In recent meetings with Deputy Secretary Armitage, Iraqi Prime Minister Allawi and the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) had expressed their commitment to hold the elections on time. The US shared concerns about possible vote fraud and was watching the situation closely. To address security concerns in Mosul, the US 82nd AirBorne Division would send a brigade, and the

Iraqi National Guard might also deploy forces. On the economic side, assistance funds were being disbursed at an accelerated rate, in an effort to give people hope for the future. A/S Burns underscored that the formation of a government after the elections was equally critical and must be closely watched. In response to DDG Gokturk's question about US plans to deal with a possible large Shia win in the elections and the protection of Sunni rights, A/S Burns emphasized that the US focus was on ensuring equitable participation in the elections. Any such outcome would be addressed afterwards.

15. (S) Kirkuk Provincial Elections: Sensoy said Kurds wanted to postpone the Kirkuk elections and seemed to be opting out of the Iraqi democratic process. He added that the recent Kurdish proposal to the UN for a referendum on independence for the Kurdish area did not bode well for the future and should be stopped at all costs. In Sensoy's view the Kurds covet Kirkuk and were doing everything conceivable to "steal it from the country." The international community must ensure that this effort did not succeed. Koruturk added that Turkey considered the lack of ethnic clashes in Iraq to-date to be hopeful, but feared that, if such a clash were to happen, it would take place in Kirkuk. A/S Burns relayed DepSec Armitage's strong message to Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Barzani that provincial and national elections were intertwined and all must occur on Jan. 30. To pull out one thread would make the whole process unravel. While Barzani did not commit to participate, the US impression was that he was moving in the right direction but trying to buy time to see what concessions he could get in return. A/S Burns was hopeful that the Kirkuk elections would take place on time.

Security:

16. (S) A/S Burns noted that the coalition was in a race against time to stand-up and train the Iraqi Security Forces and said there was an ambitious program to get them into the field. The forces had started to prove themselves during recent fighting in Fallujah, where they performed much better than during battles there in the spring, when some forces fled. He recognized Turkey's contributions to the NATO Training Mission for Iraq but emphasized the need for anything more Turkey could provide in the way of training and equipment within the context of that mission.

Second Border Opening:

17. (S) Sensoy said that passage through Habur provided the only direct route from Turkey into central Iraq. Turkey wanted to establish a second border gate and requested US assistance to ensure that its access to the Iraqi seat of government was not controlled by northern Iraq. DDG Akat seconded this request, saying that everything produced in Turkey had a market in Iraq. Turkey's trade with Iraq totaled almost USD 2 billion and had actually increased during coalition efforts. Opining that if it were left up to Barzani there would never be a second or third border opening, Deputy U/S Uzumcu asked for US pressure on Barzani, immediately following the elections, not to block the opening of a new gate. Uzumcu expressed his understanding that Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leader Talabani supported an additional border opening, believing that three to five new gates would be needed.

PKK/Kongra Gel

18. (S) Sensoy, who had participated in previous bilateral discussions on the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party)/Kongra Gel, expressed great disappointment that the US had not fulfilled Turkey's expectations or US commitments to combat these terrorists. In particular, he pointed to US agreement that no PKK-affiliated parties should participate in Iraqi elections. In spite of this, Sensoy said two PKK/Kongra Gel affiliates, the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party and the Democratic Construction Party, were registered to take part in the elections. Turkey considered this disturbing and hoped the US would address the issue (see reftel). Sensoy said Turkey still expected the elimination of the PKK from northern Iraq and wanted to see that happen in the coming months. A/S Burns emphasized that the US takes Turkey's concerns about the PKK seriously. Suggesting the Jan. 11 trilateral talks as the appropriate forum to address the issue, he confirmed that the US would send a strong team both from the region and from Washington that would be prepared to discuss all aspects of the problem.

MEPP

19. (S) Looking to the upcoming Palestinian Presidential

elections, Sensoy said he saw reason for optimism in the peace process. The new Palestinian government would face challenges from within, if Hamas viewed the rapprochement process as a threat and Israel would respond to any Hamas action. However, Sensoy was optimistic that both sides would show restraint. A/S Burns concurred that support of the post-election Palestinian government was key. While the international community had made many promises, concrete support has been limited. The US had recently announced an offer of direct economic support, the UK planned to support the re-building of the security forces and Egypt was contributing. The US also looked to the Gulf states to provide tangible deliveries.

10. (S) Israeli PM Sharon's Gaza withdrawal implementation plan was an excellent opportunity, according to Sensoy, but needed to be implemented in the context of the roadmap, and as part of a broader process. It was important for the Quartet to help the parties implement a smooth withdrawal from Gaza, which must be done in consultation with the Palestinians, and to implement the roadmap. Turkey would support the Quartet's efforts towards this end and would welcome a concrete role of its own in the process. According to Uzunucu, it was important that the Turkish public see the country take a formal role in the MEPP. A/S Burns allowed the possibility of strengthened US/TU consultations on MEPP and welcomed continued bilateral consultations during Quartet efforts.

11. (S) Noting FM's Gul's trip to Israel that morning, Uzunucu said there were two goals for the trip: 1) Emphasize to Israel that Turkey values its bilateral relationship and wants to maintain it. 2) Urge Israel to seize the current opportunity to engage the Palestinians. Gul would welcome Israel's planned withdrawal from Gaza and note Turkey's interest in supporting post-withdrawal efforts there. Uzunucu underscored that the Gaza withdrawal must be consistent with the road map and added that peace talks were also key. Turkey had heard that talks might not begin until the end of 2005, which, in his view, was too late. During discussions with the Palestinians, Uzunucu expected Gul to note Turkey's support for the peace process and for a durable settlement. He would also urge them to streamline and control Palestinian security forces. A/S Burns noted that the timing of FM Gul's visit to the region was good, with both sides having a fragile opportunity for peace, and welcomed the opportunity to talk again following the trip. He agreed that, while the Gaza withdrawal could provide a launching pad for the peace process it could not end there. The ultimate US goal remains a negotiated political settlement. We would coordinate our efforts with other countries. Egyptian participation was key. A/S Burns welcomed the opportunity to talk with Turkey following Gul's trip to the region.

12. (S) A/S Burns mentioned the Deputy Secretary's message to the Syrians to ensure that Hamas and others didn't negatively impact the peace process, and encouraged Turkey to repeat the message. In response to a question by Deputy U/S Uzunucu about re-opening the Syria/Israel peace track, A/S Burns said Syria's behavior over the next six months, during the Gaza withdrawal process, would shape the US view of a future for the Syria/Israel track. He added that a sense of hope on MEPP can positively impact Iraq and other issues in the region.

BMENA

13. (S) DDG Akat emphasized Turkey's continued support for BMENA, saying that its emphasis on transparency, equality, gender rights, etc. were in line with Turkey's foreign policy objectives. Additionally, Turkey realized it was not possible to hang all efforts in the Middle East on a successful outcome of the MEPP, and therefore, supported a parallel track. Akat noted appreciation for the change in the US position to take Turkish and EU views into account. Even countries that had initially refused to participate in BMENA subsequently signed on when they realized it was better to be included in the process than to be left out. According to Akat, Turkey supports the participation of all countries, at their own pace. Turkey's Ambassador to the OSCE had been designated to lead the government's effort and Turkey had identified an NGO to work with. The government was already working with Italy and Yemen through this forum and planned to host a meeting of the Democracy Assistance Dialogue Group in 2005. A/S Burns welcomed Turkey's participation and emphasized the need to translate Democracy Assistance Dialogue group efforts into practical actions.

14. (U) Assistant Secretary Bill Burns cleared this cable.

15. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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